



**Testimony to the Planning & Development Committee by
David Fink, Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities,
Wednesday, March 2, 2011**

Rep. Gentile, Senator Cassano, distinguished committee members, I am David Fink, policy director of the Partnership for Strong Communities – a state-wide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending chronic homelessness, expanding affordable housing opportunities and building strong and vibrant communities - and I am here to oppose any efforts to repeal or weaken the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure known as 8-30g. 8-30g is an effective way to create affordable housing; it has created close to 4,700 units of affordable homes in solid, mixed-income communities across the state, and 5,500 modest market rate units, thus providing jobs and economic activity. It has been a huge success.

The simple fact is that Connecticut has an extreme shortage of housing options affordable for all the people we need in the state, even in the aftermath of the burst housing bubble nation-wide:

- 1 out of 4 renting households makes less than 50% of median income and spends half of that on housing. Those people are “this close” to homelessness.
- The housing wage – what one must earn to afford a typical 2BR apartment in Connecticut – has risen to \$23/hour (the equivalent of a \$48,000 annual salary) from \$15.67 in 2000. Nearly half the 683 occupations in Connecticut don’t pay an average wage of \$23/hour.
- In 2000, 65.2% of the houses in the Connecticut were valued under \$200,000. By 2010, that was down to 23.1%. The statewide median household income can’t qualify for a mortgage to buy the median sales price home in 94 of our 169 cities and towns.

Most municipalities in Connecticut have allowed virtually no housing to be built that workers, young professionals, families and empty-nesters can afford. Since 2000, Connecticut has been 47th in the nation in units built per capita.. Meanwhile, affordable homes comprise 10% or more of the housing stock in only 31 of our 169 cities and towns. That means many working families in Connecticut are confined to a limited number of choices of municipalities, school districts and communities, whether they provide for the needs of their children or not.

Our lack of affordable housing opportunities in Connecticut:

- Has contributed to the fact that we have lost more 25-34-year-old population – young, skilled, labor pool – than any state in the nation.
- Means that empty-nesters are too often stuck in homes they neither need or can maintain – and which are draining because of maintenance costs and property taxes.
- Makes it difficult for adult children to come home after college or grad school to live near their families in the towns they grew up in.
- Makes it difficult for our teachers, police and firefighters to live in the communities they serve, and our municipalities must pay premiums to purchase their services.

- Results in low-income families living in substandard apartments with lead paint, asbestos, dust mites, broken pipes that all lead to respiratory illness (asthma is the leading cause of absenteeism in urban schools) and other hazards.
- Has not focused on the possibility of higher-density affordable homes near transit and in other smart-growth locations, we have not enjoyed the benefits of less highway congestion, lower auto emissions, lower household energy costs and greater energy-efficiency (Governor Malloy has asked the State Bond Commission to authorize funds to promote demonstration Transit Oriented Development projects, and the HomeConnecticut statute promotes denser housing development in town centers and communities where infrastructure allows for this type of housing development).

Our affordable housing appeals statute (8-30g) is only one tool, but it allows a builder to initiate home construction when a town won't consider it. It is there if municipalities don't provide the housing the state, its residents and its business community all need.

The repercussions towns cite – higher crime, lower property values, increased school costs – are myths or misconceptions that have been disproved by reputable research by such respected institutions as MIT, Rutgers University and UMass.

The fact is that most of the towns that have faced 8-30g proposals that they opposed haven't planned, proactively, to create an array of housing options for all the people they need in town. Richer towns have relied on lower-priced towns to house their police, firefighters, teachers and other municipal and commercial workers.

Towns needn't be burdened by 8-30g. All they have to do is plan, proactively, to create that array of housing options. There are many tools to do that. HOMEConnecticut is one that has proven quite useful for many different kinds of towns, but there are others.

Creating more affordable housing, especially in town centers and near transit, can get cars off the road and reduce auto emissions and sprawl, it can provide children now living in overcrowded or lead-burdened old homes a healthier place to live, and it can help achieve better school performance. CT leads the U.S. in achievement gap, largely because many of its underperforming students are trapped in school districts that are overburdened and neighborhoods that don't have the soccer, school enrichments, library branches and other community services that help kids learn and grow.

There is no reason to change 8-30g. It has worked, but it hasn't yet succeeded in creating all the affordable housing we need. The Partnership for Strong Communities asks this Committee to keep this necessary and important statute intact.